

2011 Annual Report

Of the

COMMITTEE OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS

During 2011, the Committee of Concerned Scientists continued to advocate on behalf of scientists, physicians, engineers and scholars, as well as groups or scientific organizations threatened for political reasons. We wrote in concern for more than 20 individual colleagues or their organizations, located in 17 countries. We generally addressed our letters to the heads of state, as well as to the ministries or local authorities with jurisdiction over the issues when we were able to identify such bodies. Where we could hope for their assistance, we contacted the ambassador of the country involved, as well as the relevant US embassy or the US State Department.

The following summaries will give you an idea of the grave risks our colleagues are running in exercising their human rights, as well as of the rare victories we and our partner human rights organizations have achieved on their behalf.

BAHRAIN

Severe repression greeted peaceful protests for democracy and human rights in Bahrain following the "Arab Spring" demonstrations in Middle Eastern countries. For following their ethical duty to treat injured protesters, **nurses and doctors** were arrested and disappeared, in clear violation of

international treaties and customs. In conjunction with other human rights organizations, particularly Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), CCS wrote to protest this unjust treatment of health professionals in Bahrain.

In September, we welcomed the news of the release of 14 Bahraini doctors from detention, but remained concerned regarding charges still pending against them. In October, Bahrain's Attorney General vacated the rulings of the military courts and ordered the remaining health professionals to be tried in civilian courts. We will continue to protest any punishment of these professionals for following their professional duty.

Professor **Abdul Jalil Al-Singace**, who taught mechanical engineering at the University of Bahrain, was arrested in August 2010 upon his return from the United Kingdom where he had addressed the House of Lords concerning human rights in Bahrain. Al-Singace also directed the Human Rights Bureau of the Haq Movement for Civil Liberties and Democracy, an opposition Bahraini political movement. We wrote to protest his arrest and detention without charges, as well as his inability to get medical treatment. Dr. Al-Singace suffers from poliomyelitis. After Dr. Abdul Jail Al-Singace's brief release from jail in March of 2011, CCS wrote again to express deep disappointment on learning of his re-arrest. On June 22, 2011, Dr. Al-Singace was sentenced to life in prison. We remain deeply concerned by continuing reports that Dr. Al-Signace is being held without regular access to medical care. He was reported to have engaged in a hunger strike.

Dr. **Masaud Jahromi**, Chairman of the Department of Computer Science and Engineering at Ahlia University's College of

Mathematical Sciences and Information Technology was arrested on April 14, 2011. According to reports, the police broke into his house in the middle of the night, threatened and harassed members of his family, confiscated the family's laptops, and beat Professor Jahromi. Reports also indicate that in detention Professor Jahromi was not receiving medical treatment for serious medical problems including Hepatitis C. We urged authorities to ensure his well-being. Professor Jack Minker enlisted the support of colleagues in computer sciences by means of a Letter to the Editor of the Communications of the ACM in November 2011. **Good news:** On January 19, 2012, Bahrain's Public Prosecutor dismissed charges against Dr. Jahromi arising out of his "participation in an unlawful protest," following the Bahraini Independent Commission of Inquiry's criticism of the government's crackdowns on free speech at Universities. Nevertheless, the court afterwards sentenced Dr. Jahromi to pay a fine and to serve a sentence that had already been fulfilled by his time in prison. He has not been reinstated in his position at Ahlia University in spite of these developments. We will continue to advocate assuring him of due process.

BELARUS

Aleksandr Feduta, a European Humanities University (EHU) lecturer and journalist, was arrested with hundreds of other opposition activists, including 11 EHU students, in the aftermath of the contested Belarusian presidential election on 19 December 2010. CCS had written protesting Feduta's exercise of his human rights. **Good news:** on May 20, 2011, the Frunzenski District Court in Minsk sentenced Feduta to two years probation.

BULGARIA

We joined European science organizations and individual scientists in protesting proposed further budget Government cuts to the **Bulgarian Academy of Science** and its elimination. This independent, 141-year old institution contributes almost 60% of the country's science research and works with many international organizations, according to its defenders. The Bulgarian Parliament was set to review legislation that would dismantle the Academy into separate institutes under government control. The Academy alleged that the reason for this move was to nationalize and sell the property of the Academy, on the model of a similar nationalization in Georgia. In our appeals to the Prime Minister and the Chair of Parliament, we invoked Article 15 of the International Convention on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights (to which Bulgaria is a signatory), recognizing the right of everyone to the benefits of science and of international contacts and cooperation in science.

CHILE

Dr. **Boris Weisfeiler**, a Professor of Mathematics at Penn State University, disappeared in Chile during hiking trip in 1985. His backpack was found ten days later. Weisfeiler's family and friends, with the support of CCS, tried to find out what happened. In 2000 declassified materials at the US Embassy revealed that Weisfeiler might have been abducted and murdered by a religious community with ties to former Nazis and the Pinochet government. The family filed a suit seeking justice. In 2010 Weisfeiler's widow Olga and his son Lev presented evidence to the Chilean Human Rights Commission. As of August 2011, the

Commission had not accepted the case as a human rights violation. We will continue to support the family's efforts through the Weisfeiler Legal Defense Fund.

CHINA

Dr. **Wang Bingzhang**, a Chinese medical doctor with a 1982 Ph.D. degree in pathology from McGill University, was a founder of the Chinese pro-democracy movement. After studying in Canada, he returned to China several times and was expelled for his pro-democracy advocacy in the 1990s. In 2002, while in Vietnam, he was abducted by Chinese agents. After months of secret imprisonment, Wang was sentenced to life in prison on charges of espionage and terrorism. We urged Canada's Prime Minister to take immediate action on behalf of Dr. Wang by granting him Canadian citizenship based on his Canadian contacts. **In response:** Canada's Office of the Prime Minister acknowledged our letter, promised careful consideration, and shared it with the Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs.

On December 8, 2011, CCS protested the continued detention of **Dr. Zicheng Hu**, a Chinese-American engineer who has been unable to leave China since November 2008. We understand that Dr. Hu, an award-winning Chinese-American engineer whose work focuses on automobile emission control, was detained in November 2008 by Tianjin Police while he was on a business trip to China. A competitor in Tianjin accused him of "stealing technology." In April 2010, Tianjin City Prosecutor's office and Tianjin Court jointly withdrew the case against him and Dr. Hu was freed without charge. Despite this, Tianjin Police has continued the border control that prevents him from coming home to the United States, without giving any reason. Dr. Hu has been separated

from his family for three years due to this incident. CCS urged the government of China to release him immediately. We pointed out that Dr. Hu's continued detention without any charges violates his right to travel freely between his own and other countries, under Article 12 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, to which China is a signatory.

Good news: Imprisoned human rights activist **Hu Jia** was released in the pre-dawn hours Sunday, June 18, 2011, and returned to his home in Beijing. We had written in grave concern supporting Hu Jia's application for medical parole. Hu Jia, who had served two years and three months of his sentence, has cirrhosis of the liver, and his condition had deteriorated during his imprisonment. More recently, police interrogated Hu Jia in February of 2012 after he used his Twitter account to call on the authorities to allow the family of another jailed human rights lawyer, Gao Zhisheng, prison visits.

CUBA

The Committee of Concerned Scientists expressed its shock and sadness at the death of **Wilmar Villar Mendoza**, a 31-year old member of the human rights group UMPACU (Union Patriotica de Cuba). Villar was beaten and arrested following a peaceful protest in Contramaestre on November 14, 2011, and sentenced to four years in prison. He began a hunger strike in the Prison of Aguadores on November 25, 2011, to protest the false accusations that led to incarceration, and died on January 18, 2012, after multiple organ failure and generalized sepsis.

COLOMBIA

Dr. **Miguel Angel Beltran Villegas**, an Associate Professor of Sociology at the Universidad National de Colombia and a critic of the government, was arrested in May 2009 on terrorism charges. The allegations against Beltran were that he had supported the military insurgency in Colombia (FARC) under the pseudonym of Cienfuegos and that files seized from a dead FARC leader referred to him under that pseudonym. CCS wrote to President Calderon, requesting a fair trial for Beltran. **Good news:** Beltran Villegas was acquitted of being a member of the FARC. The judge in his case decided that the files, the only evidence on which the allegations were based, were inadmissible.

FRANCE

Dr. **Adlène Hicheur**, a high-energy physicist who has worked on the world's largest particle collider, has been held in a French prison under suspicion of terrorism for more than two years without a trial. CCS wrote to French President Nicolas Sarkozy, urging him to investigate the circumstances of Dr. Hicheur's detention.

INDIA

Good news: The Supreme Court of India granted bail in April, 2011 to Dr. **Binayak Sen**, observing that no case of sedition was made out against the human rights activist, who was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment by a trial court in Chhattisgarh state. CCS had advocated on behalf of Dr. Sen, who had set up clinics for impoverished and minority people in his

province. In 2009 central authorities in India had ordered Dr. Sen's release on bail in order to receive medical attention after protests by us and by international human rights groups, intellectuals and doctors. On September 22, 2011, Dr. Sen (who is free to travel in India while on bail but not abroad) was awarded the Heinz R. Pagels Human Rights Prize by the New York Academy of Science in absentia.

IRAN

On his return to his native Iran last winter, **Omid Kokabee**, a graduate student in optics at the University of Texas, was arrested and accused of "communicating with a hostile government" and of "illegitimate earnings." CCS wrote an open letter in the publication *Nature* to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamene'i requesting Kokabee's release from jail. CCS assured the Iranian authorities that Kokabee's professors and fellow students all confirm that he was dedicated to his studies and refrained from engaging in politics. Kokabee's trial, which was scheduled to start in August, was postponed until October 2011. At that time, he was told that no trial would be scheduled for at least four more months. We are posting a petition on behalf of Omid Kokabee on the CCS website and will continue to advocate on his behalf.

Mr. **Ramin Zibaei**, a scholar of psychology and dean at the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education in Tehran, has been arrested and detained for several months. We understand that Mr. Ramin Zibaei was one of over a dozen staff and faculty members of the BIHE arrested in late May, part of a pattern of persecution of Baha'I educators in Iran. Since his arrest Mr. Zibaei has not been permitted to receive regular visits from his

family and has not been granted access to legal counsel, in apparent disregard of international standards of due process, fair trial and detention, as guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Iran is signatory. We urged authorities to ensure that Iran's obligations under international law are upheld with regard to Mr. Zibaei and his colleagues at the Baha'i Institute of Higher Education (BIHE),

Good news: We were happy to report that **Dr. Arash Alaei** has been released from Evin Prison in Tehran in 2011. In November 2010. Arash's brother, **Dr. Kamiar Alaei**, was released after over two years of detention and returned to complete his studies at Albany Medical School. Both doctors were internationally known advocates for HIV/AIDS patients and had been imprisoned before attending an international conference on HIV/AIDS. Dr Kamiar Alaei publicly thanked all of the organizations around the world who had campaigned for the

Good news: Iranian-American sociologist **Kian Tajbakhsh**, sentenced to 15 years for espionage, over our and others' protest, has had to post bail in the amount of \$800,000 but his sentence has been reduced to five years. Kian's request for a further extension of his temporary release as of 2010 has been approved, allowing him to remain at home. While he is currently unable to leave Iran, Kian is optimistic that his request to travel internationally will receive a positive reply.

We welcomed the release on bail in June, 2011 of Professor **Emadeddin Baghi** after 189 days in prison. Our previous letter to Iranian authorities described his health problems. According to Reporters Without Borders, however, he is barred from political

activity for five years. He is also awaiting a second trial by the Intelligence Ministry relating to his appearance on BBC Persia together with the late government critic Grand Ayatollah Hosseinali-Monatazeri.

RUSSIA

We wrote in concern about Dr. **Boris Nemtsov**, a physicist and former Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, who was arrested on December 31, 2010 while participating in a peaceful rally in Moscow. A court sentenced him to 15 days in jail for "disobeying police instructions." According to news reports, Nemtsov tried to appeal his sentence as violating his human rights to a fair trial but the court refused to hear the appeal during its New Year's holiday, even though it had sanctioned Nemtsov's and other demonstrators' arrests during the same period and handed down their sentences. Nemtsov has appealed to the International Court of Justice in Strasbourg claiming violation of his rights under the European Convention on Human Rights. We urged Russian authorities to reverse his sentence, even if Dr Nemtsov has completed serving his jail term and to compensate him for the damage inflicted upon him. **In response:** We received letters from the Office of the Russian Attorney General and from the Ministry of Internal Affairs – kindly translated by Co-chair Eugene Chudnovsky -- claiming that proper procedures had been followed.

SWAZILAND

Maxwell Dlamini, President of the National Union of Students of Swaziland, was reported arrested and possibly tortured after a peaceful demonstration CCS called for his

release. The actions of the Government of Swaziland appeared to violate a number of international covenants protecting free speech, freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention and torture, to all of which Swaziland has acceded. These are the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant against Torture and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights.

THAILAND

Somsak Jeamteerasakul, a professor of history at Bangkok's Thammasat University, turned himself in to the police on May 11, 2011, to hear official charges, after weeks of threats that charges would be laid. Jeamteerasakul had written about ways in which the monarchy could be reformed. He was presented with charges lodged by the Thai military that he had violated a law that forbids anyone from defaming, insulting or threatening leading members of the royal family, a serious offense that carries a prison sentence of up to 15 years. Released after being charged at a Bangkok police station, Jeamteerasakul said that the charges stem from an open letter he had posted on the Internet to a member of the royal family who was not covered by the law against lese majesty. We strongly urged the Thai authorities to immediately drop all charges against Professor Somsak Jeamteerasakul for exercising his human rights of expression. Thailand is a signatory to the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, which requires the government to protect all citizens from arbitrary arrest or detention.

TURKEY

The government of Turkey issued a decree in August of 2011 that would strip the **Turkish Academy of Science** of its autonomy by requiring that political bodies appoint its president and most of its members. CCS joined scientific colleagues in urging the Turkish government to reverse the decree and to restore the autonomy of the Academy. **Good news:** In November of 2011 a new decree increased the members of the Science Academy that are to be appointed by the Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey rather than the government and these members will participate in electing a president. However, many members of the Academy had already resigned from the former academy and are planning to form an independent science association.

Dr. Busra Ersanlı is a professor at the Faculty of Political Science and International Relations at Marmara University in Istanbul. According to Scholars at Risk, an independent human rights organization affiliated with New York University, she also serves as a member of the constitutional commission of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), a political party. Professor Ersanlı, arrested on October 28, 2011, was charged with "membership in an illegal organization" under Turkey's Anti Terror Law. This charge appears to reflect the authorities' view that the BDP and Dr. Erslani are indirectly and by association linked to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is banned in Turkey and designated a terrorist organization. CCS protested Dr. Ersanlı's arrest based solely on nonviolent expression of political views and association with others, conduct which is expressly protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil

and Political Rights, to which Turkey is a signatory, and the European Convention on Human Rights, to which Turkey is party.

Dr. **Mehmet Haberal**, the rector of Baskent University in Ankara, who pioneered transplant surgery in Turkey, and physician **Fatih Hilmioğlu**, former rector of İnönü University in Malatya, have been detained in jail for almost three years. Turkish law allows indicted individuals to be kept in long-term detention only if there is a danger that they might either destroy evidence or flee. Supporters say that both scientists are being treated for poor health and neither danger applies. Dr. Hilmioğlu suffers from cirrhosis of the liver and reportedly is gravely ill. Dr. Haberal has angina, cardiac arrhythmia, and severe anxiety and depression. Drs. Haberal and Hilmioğlu were held in hospitals where they reportedly were receiving medical attention but were transferred back to prison. Since then, their health reportedly took a turn for the worse and both had to be rushed to the hospital. We wrote to express our concern that years in detention pending trial, especially under these circumstances, surely exceed any limitations. We urgently requested that Drs. Haberal and Hilmioğlu be released for health reasons pending the outcome of their trials.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

CCS was among the many human rights groups and academic associations advocating for **Dr. Nasser bin Ghaith**, a lecturer of economics at the Abu Dhabi branch of the Paris-based Sorbonne University in the United Arab Emirates, who was detained in April in Dubai and charged for being a threat to public security. The charges appeared to be based on his peaceful criticism of the government of the United Arab Emirates. His

trial, which started on July 14, 2011, was held behind closed doors. The charges are based on his peaceful criticisms of the government of the United Arab Emirates. CCS wrote protesting the arrest.

UNITED STATES

Following up on our previous activities on behalf of Omid Kokabee, an Iranian student at Texas University arrested as a spy upon his return to Iran, CCS wrote to US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton about his arrest and its chilling effect on **Iranian students** in the United States, who now fear that they will also be arrested if they go home to Iran. We expressed our belief that such fears present serious obstacles to international academic cooperation, as well as to the exercise of such human rights as travel (under the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights) and education (under the International Convention on Economic, Cultural, and Social Rights). We suggested that the US Department of State consider whether any diplomatic steps can be taken to resolve this situation involving possibly thousands of Iranian students and many academic institutions.

VIETNAM

Good news: We welcomed the release from prison on January 13, 2012, of **Pham Minh Hoang**, French-Vietnamese professor of mathematics at Ho Chi Minh City Polytechnic Institute. CCS was among the many human rights groups and academic associations advocating for Professor Hoang's release. Hoang was arrested on August 13, 2010 and accused of sedition after publishing blogs criticizing the environmental impact of a bauxite extraction

project undertaken with Chinese government assistance. CCS wrote protesting his arrest for exercising his rights to free speech and requested the assistance of the French government. In September 2011, Hoang was sentenced to three years imprisonment and three additional years of house arrest. That sentence was reduced to house arrest upon his release from jail. The French Foreign Office had assured CCS that their representatives in Vietnam had attended Hoang's trial and visited him regularly in jail. The French government's assistance might have been influential in reducing Hoang's sentence to house arrest.

CCS GRANT: MALTA V INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

CCS co-sponsored Malta V, an international scientific conference held in December of 2011 in Paris under UNESCO sponsorship. These conferences, which use science as a bridge to peace in the Middle East, have been held since 2003. In the past, scientists from 15 Middle East countries attended (Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and United Arab Emirates) to share their scholarship with each other. In 2011, out of the participating countries, only Iran's government prevented invited Iranian scientists from attending the conference.

Executive Director's Note:

I am delighted to follow the past practice of expressing gratitude for the unstinting assistance and wise counsel provided to me as Executive Director throughout the year by the co-chairs of the Committee of Concerned Scientists – Eugene Chudnovsky, Alexander Greer, Joel Lebowitz, Paul Plotz, and

Walter Reich. It would have been impossible for CCS to perform its mission without their generous support and advice. We are also indebted, as a Committee, to our steadfast partner human rights organizations – Scholars at Risk, The National Academies, and Physicians for Human Rights – who have provided information and advocacy in so many of our cases.

Sophie Cook, Executive Director, CCS